

# Southern Living®

## OUR 10 EASIEST LAYER CAKES

(ever)

## Secret Gulf Beach Escape

*Affordable  
& without  
the crowds!*

**PLUS:**

## Can't-Miss Gardening Tips From Disney

{**INSIDE**}

**Mid-Atlantic  
Living**  
BONUS SECTION

## *the locals reveal the* **Natchez Mystique**

“A Mississippi town where you see the past,  
the present, and the future”



**LEFT TO RIGHT:** Adding simple things such as birdhouses and flowers can attract birds and butterflies to a backyard or city park. Dona and John Hardi worked for four years to build a wildlife habitat in their yard. Falls Church City residents of all ages take part in community environmental efforts such as The Neighborhood Tree Program.



she travels the country helping humans help wildlife.

“The program started in 1973, and in that time we’ve seen more than 113,000 properties turned into habitats,” Roxanne says. “The application went online about five years ago, and we put information on how to build a habitat on our Web site. Since then the number of people taking part in the program has tripled.”

To be named a NWF Community Wildlife Habitat, a town must be filled with certified havens in yards, common areas, and school grounds. Since joining the program, Falls Church City residents have created about 90 such places within their city limits, Roxanne adds.

“Virginia is one of the most successful habitat states in the country,” she says. “The towns of Reston, Great Falls, and South Riding and the community of Broadlands have also achieved certified status. And all of Arlington County is a wildlife habitat—one of only three such counties in the United States.”

While NWF works to get more people into the habitat habit, Mia and Henry welcome a variety of visitors to their backyard. “It was certified two years ago,” she says. “Now we have all sorts of animals passing through. Just the other day, Henry saw a fox. Boy, did he get excited!” ●

For more information on the National Wildlife Federation habitat programs, visit [www.nwf.org/gardenforwildlife](http://www.nwf.org/gardenforwildlife), or call 1-800-822-9919. For information on Falls Church City’s environmental programs, visit [www.fallschurchenvironment.org](http://www.fallschurchenvironment.org).

# Humanity for Habitats

The folks of Falls Church City, Virginia, create safe places for birds, bees, and all sorts of other wild critters. By **James T. Black**

**M**ia Musolino couldn’t believe a simple salamander could generate such excitement. “I grew up on a farm, so I saw wildlife all the time,” she says. “I just took it for granted. Then my son, Henry, saw a salamander in our backyard and got so excited. I started thinking how sad it would be if he never saw one out there again.”

**A Green Community** So the Falls Church City resident got in touch with the National Wildlife Federation (NWF). Based in Reston, Virginia, the nonprofit organization helps homeowners, businesses, schools, and communities across the country create safe havens for birds, butterflies, and other wild creatures.

Once a yard, school ground, or city park meets NWF criteria, the federation certifies it as a wildlife habitat. If a city, county, or community gathers enough habitats within its boundaries, the organization gives the entire area a certified habitat status.

To help Mia get started on her backyard nature preserve, the NWF suggested she become a Habitat Steward. “That’s a person who learns how to build one and then shows others,” Mia remembers. “Some neighbors joined me, and we took a plan to the city council. In the summer of 2005 we started the Falls Church City Community Wildlife Habitat project to get the whole city involved.”

Luckily, Mia and her neighbors live in a habitat-happy town.

One of the Virginia’s Greenest communities, Falls Church City had already implemented several local environmental efforts such as a neighborhood tree-planting program, native plant sales, and an adopt-a-windmill campaign.

“This is a small, dense city that’s only about 2 square miles in size,” Mia says. “Neighbors live so close together that having backyard habitats really makes a difference.”

**Home Sweet Home** Like Mia, John and Dona Hardi were among the first homeowners to turn their yard into a wildlife haven. “It was mostly just a grass lawn, so we had to build flowerbeds, put in walking paths, and plant trees,” John says. “It’s been five years of hauling soil and mulch.”

To obtain NWF certification John and Dona planted seed-filled flowers such as black-eyed Susans and berry-bearing trees such as dogwoods. Their project has been a horticultural—and educational—experience, John says.

“One day I was sitting in the backyard looking at a willow oak,” he adds. “A blue jay flew into it and started eating the tree’s acorns. I didn’t even know blue jays ate acorns.”

**Hundreds of Havens** Roxanne Paul smiles when she hears John’s story about the happiness of a blue jay. As senior coordinator of the NWF’s Habitat Education Program,

PHOTOGRAPHS: SCOTT SUCHMAN